AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1 - 22.   (Cancelled)

23.   (Currently Amended)   ~~The~~ A method ~~as recited in claim 20~~ for accessing or generating an argument supporting a conclusion for a given situation, the method comprising:

using a processor, performing steps comprising:

presenting to a user a plurality of searchable templates, wherein a subset of the plurality of searchable templates is relevant to the given situation;

receiving from said user a selection of one of said plurality of searchable templates from said subset that is relevant to the given situation, said one of said plurality of searchable templates being a relevant template most related to the given situation and including a plurality of queries;

displaying said plurality of queries to said user, wherein each of said plurality of queries has a categorical scale of likelihood regarding whether the given situation will likely have a negative or positive result, the categorical scale of likelihood being represented by a plurality of potential responses, said categorical scale of likelihood being associated with said plurality of potential responses before said plurality of queries is displayed to said user, and wherein the plurality of queries is formed in a hierarchical structure, wherein a parent query that has a plurality of children queries is automatically responded to by responded to the children queries of the parent query;

presenting to the user at least one discovery tool that links to an external data source to facilitate responding to at least one of the plurality of queries;

receiving from said user one or more user responses to said plurality of queries, where each of said one or more user responses is selected from the

plurality of potential responses such that each of the user responses indicates a likelihood of a negative or positive result for an associated one of the plurality of queries;

receiving from said user supporting evidence in response to said plurality of queries, the supporting evidence being relied on by the user to form at least one of the one or more user responses;

associating said supporting evidence received from said user with at least one of said plurality of queries for which a user response has been received;

evaluating said one or more user responses, in accordance with the likelihood of a negative or positive result indicated by each of said one or more user responses, such that said one or more user responses collectively support a conclusion indicating whether the given situation will likely have a positive or negative result;

forming an argument supporting the conclusion of the evaluating, the argument comprising the relevant template, the one or more user responses, the supporting evidence, and the conclusion; and

publishing said argument, including said relevant template, said one or more user responses, said supporting evidence, and said conclusion, for review.

24.   (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 20 23, wherein input to one or more of the plurality of queries is received from a plurality of users over a computer network.

25.   (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 24, the method further comprising allowing one or more of the plurality of users to generate and associate comments to at least a portion of the new argument.

26.   (Previously Presented)   The method as recited in claim 25, wherein the comments are only accessible by one or more specified users.

27. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim ~~20~~ 23, wherein each of the plurality of queries is a multiple choice question.

28. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 27, wherein each multiple choice question asks to what degree of likelihood will a particular factor related to the given situation have a positive or negative result.

29. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 28, wherein each multiple choice question has a categorical scale of likelihood represented by a set of responses that partition the categorical scale of likelihood.

30. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 28, wherein each of the plurality of queries is formed in a first hierarchical structure, the method further comprising automatically answering a parent query having a plurality of children queries based on responses to the children queries of the parent.

31. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 30, the method further comprising receiving more than one response for at least one of the plurality of queries.

32. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 30, wherein the parent query is automatically responded to using a response technique selected by a user.

33. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 32, wherein the response technique is selected from a group comprising: a maximization technique, an averaging technique, and a minimization technique.

34. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 30, wherein each response within the first hierarchical structure has a color selected from a subset of colors, each of the plurality of colors representing a different response so that colors of the first hierarchical structure convey a line of reasoning.

35.   (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 30, wherein one or more of the plurality of queries is associated with a second hierarchical structure of queries and the first hierarchical structure and the second hierarchical structure together form a set of cascaded arguments.

36.   (Cancelled)

37.   (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim ~~20~~ 23, wherein each of the plurality of searchable templates is associated with a situation descriptor, the method further comprising selecting one of the plurality of searchable templates which is most relevant to the given situation by comparing the given situation to situation descriptors associated with the plurality of searchable templates to thereby find most relevant ones of the plurality of searchable templates having situation descriptors that most closely match the given situation.

38.   (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim ~~20~~ 23, the method further comprising creating a new template, wherein the new template is created by an expert.

39. - 40.   (Cancelled)

41.   (Currently Amended) ~~The~~ A computer readable storage medium ~~as recited in claim 39~~ containing executable program instructions for accessing or generating an argument supporting a conclusion for a given situation, the instructions causing a processor to perform steps comprising:

        presenting to a user a plurality of searchable templates, wherein a subset of the plurality of searchable templates is relevant to the given situation;

        receiving from said user a selection of one of said plurality of searchable templates from said subset that is relevant to the given situation, said one of said plurality of searchable templates being a relevant template most related to the given

situation and including a plurality of queries;

    displaying said plurality of queries to said user, wherein each of said plurality of queries has a categorical scale of likelihood regarding whether the given situation will likely have a negative or positive result, the categorical scale of likelihood being represented by a plurality of potential responses, said categorical scale of likelihood being associated with said plurality of potential responses before said plurality of queries is displayed to said user, and wherein the plurality of queries is formed in a hierarchical structure, wherein a parent query that has a plurality of children queries is automatically responded to by responded to the children queries of the parent query;

    presenting to the user at least one discovery tool that links to an external data source to facilitate responding to at least one of the plurality of queries;

    receiving from said user one or more user responses to said plurality of queries, where each of said one or more user responses is selected from the plurality of potential responses such that each of the user responses indicates a likelihood of a negative or positive result for an associated one of the plurality of queries;

    receiving from said user supporting evidence in response to said plurality of queries, the supporting evidence being relied on by the user to form at least one of the one or more user responses;

    associating said supporting evidence received from said user with at least one of said plurality of queries for which a user response has been received;

    evaluating said one or more user responses, in accordance with the likelihood of a negative or positive result indicated by each of said one or more user responses, such that said one or more user responses collectively support a conclusion indicating whether the given situation will likely have a positive or negative result;

    forming an argument supporting the conclusion of the evaluating, the argument comprising the relevant template, the one or more user responses, the supporting evidence, and the conclusion; and

    publishing said argument, including said relevant template, said one or more user responses, said supporting evidence, and said conclusion, for review.

42.   (Currently Amended) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 39 41, further comprising:

   associating a rationale with each of the user responses.

43.   (Currently Amended) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 39 41, wherein input to one or more of the plurality of queries is received from a plurality of users over a computer network.

44.   (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium system as recited in claim 43, further comprising:

   allowing one or more of the plurality of users to generate and associate comments to at least a portion of the argument.

45.   (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium system as recited in claim 44, wherein the comments are only accessible by one or more specified users.

46.   (Currently Amended) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 39 41, wherein each of the plurality of queries is a multiple choice question.

47.   (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 46, wherein each multiple choice question asks to what degree of likelihood will a particular factor related to the given situation have a positive or negative result.

48.   (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 47, wherein each multiple choice question has a categorical scale of likelihood represented by a set of responses that partition the categorical scale of likelihood.

49.   (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 47, wherein the plurality of queries associated with each of the plurality templates

are formed in a first hierarchical structure, and further comprising:

automatically answering a parent query having a plurality of children queries based on responses to children queries of the parent query.

50. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 49, further comprising:

allowing more than one response for each of the plurality of queries.

51. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 49, wherein the parent query is automatically answered using a response technique selected by a user.

52. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 51, wherein the response technique is selected from a group comprising: a maximization technique, an averaging technique, and a minimization technique.

53. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 49, wherein each response within the first hierarchical structure has a color selected from a subset of colors, each color of the subset of colors representing a different response so that colors of the first hierarchical structure convey a line of reasoning.

54. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 49, wherein one or more of the plurality of queries is associated with a second hierarchical structure of queries and the first hierarchical structure and the second hierarchical structure together form a set of cascaded arguments.

55. (Currently Amended) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 39 41, wherein each of the plurality of templates is associated with a situation descriptor and the argument server selects one of the plurality of templates which is most relevant

to the given situation by comparing the given situation to situation descriptors associated with the plurality of templates to thereby find a most relevant one of the plurality of templates having a situation descriptor that most closely matches the given situation.

56.   (Currently Amended) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 39 41, further comprising:

allowing a creation of a new template, wherein the new template is created by an expert.

57.   (New) The method as recited in claim 23, further comprising associating a rationale provided by said user to each of said plurality of queries for which a response has been received.